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ABSTRACT

This booklet focuses on understanding authentic learning and assessment practices and their effect on students and teachers at the middle level. After an examination of what is meant by authentic learning, five guidelines are suggested for use in selecting authentic content for middle level students. Specifically, authentic materials: (1) should reflect important themes and ideas; (2) should be consistent with curriculum goals; (3) should be rooted in real-world experiences and have application both inside and outside school; (4) should be sensitive to students' developmental progression; and (5) should allow students to engage in critical thinking. The guidelines are followed by a discussion of the value of authentic learning and its assessment. Examples of authentic assessment tools are given, and their use by teachers to base success on performance efforts that show continuous improvement over time is stressed. The booklet then answers the questions, "Who are our learners?" and "What are the roles of all of the partners to insure education for all?" The first question is answered by examining the demographics of students in terms of parental status, cultural diversity and socioeconomic level. The second question is answered by defining the new partnership roles of students, educators, parents and all community members. The importance of educators' engaging in thoughtful reflection and inquiry on questions about learning and teaching is highlighted. The paper concludes with the expressed need to focus assessment on improvement and effort, and not merely on the ability to succeed or fail. Contains an 18-item list of M.A.M.S.E. resources. (BAC)

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Focus on Authentic Learning and Assessment in the Middle School

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Introduction

This **FOCUS** paper is written specifically for middle level educators, but has important implications for all educators and community members. The purpose of the paper is to define and discuss authentic learning and assessment practices and how they directly influence the successes of both students and teachers. A discussion answers the question, "Who are our learners?" and begins to define the new partnership roles of students, educators, parents and all community members. The community partnership concept is developed to insure that **all** students receive a quality education in an environment where equity is valued.

While the paper does not offer tried and tested solutions, it highlights the importance of educators engaging in thoughtful reflection and inquiry on questions raised about learning and teaching. Middle level educators are challenged to think about possible changes that will have a positive effect on student learning. Reflective practice by practitioners is a new skill for many but is essential in the classroom today and in the future.

Middle level educational philosophy focuses on providing learning opportunities for students and creating schools and classrooms where parents are seen as valued partners.

Authentic Learning Defined

Have you created a classroom environment that invites students to be actively involved in their learning and take risks to gain new knowledge through inquiry? Do they know that it's OK to make mistakes? Do they see **you** taking risks to learn, even if you, too, might make mistakes along the way? Do your students sense that you have an inquiring mind and encourage their questions in the classroom?

As a middle level teacher, you must choose to **be authentic** yourself if students are to engage in authentic learning. Carl Rogers addressed behaving authentically and identified three characteristics as being fundamental:

1. provide unqualified positive regard for the student;
2. demonstrate a deep ability to empathize and
3. behave out of your real personhood rather than out of some role.[1]

Rogers suggests that you can expect the following outcomes from engaging an authentic, student-centered approach to teaching:

1. ". . . learners willingly accept responsibility for their learning.
2. . . . they develop their own program for learning, either alone or in cooperation with others.
3. . . . learners feel free to learn in a climate of authenticity and mutual trust — a facilitative learning environment.
4. lifelong learning prevails — students are motivated to continue to learn . . .".

Stephen Schneider, a MacArthur Fellow, describes authentic teaching

and learning from a methodological perspective. He writes, ". . . I like to conduct dialogues with the kids . . . helping to empower them to think for themselves and have the courage to express it . . . (they) really have no hesitation about telling you what they think if you free them of the stigma of having to be 'right.' "[2]

An original play written by sixth graders and shared with students and community members.

Authentic learning **makes sense** to both you and the students. It is the antithesis of sterile teaching where students serve as uncritical sponges. From the outset, both you and the students assess performance and measure improvement in a variety of ways. Students are constantly rethinking old ideas while meshing or remodeling them with new concepts. At the middle level of schooling, a lot of this takes place outside the school environment so parents need to become keenly aware of what it is you are trying to do and how you are going about doing it. Students need to develop new skills in providing feedback for you and strategies for how they will assess their own efforts.

An appreciable amount of time must be devoted to providing opportunities for students to write, listen, reflect, discuss and question themselves and others. Only through a diversity of activities can you expect students to make new connections, integrate their learning and find the ways and means to apply what they have learned to new situations. Without these activities, you do **not** have authentic learning, especially as viewed by your students.

Authentic learning and assessment cannot occur without there being authentic **content.** "Authentic content must be reflective of subjects that

make up the . . . curriculum — material that goes to the heart of a discipline and material that allows for personal application of ideas that go beyond school-related activities."

Five guidelines are suggested for use in selecting authentic content for middle level students.

1. "Material should reflect important themes and ideas.
2. Materials should be consistent with the goals of the subject area curriculum in your school district.
3. Material should be rooted in real-world experiences and have application to the world both inside and outside school.
4. Materials should be sensitive to the developmental progression of students.
5. Materials should allow students to engage in critical thinking . . . the material selected must contain content that encourages questions requiring more than a reproduction of knowledge — more than merely answering textually explicit or implicit questions . . . (it) must require students to interpret, analyze, or manipulate information that cannot be resolved through the routine application of previously learned knowledge."[3]

In many schools today, the majority of learning and assessment is based on the linguistic and logical-mathematical abilities of students. However, Howard Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences suggests that each of us has possible combinations of seven categories of ability: linguistic; logical-mathematical; musical; spatial; bodily-kinesthetic; intrapersonal and interpersonal. Exploring how to teach to the seldom recognized five abilities might greatly enhance the authenticity of teaching for larger numbers of middle level students.

From yet another perspective, Robert Sternberg identifies three major learning styles or "ways of being smart" as analytic, synthetic and practical. But, he argues, only the first, analytic, is typically recognized in schools. He believes that unless teachers take students' favored or preferred styles into account, they will confuse styles with the quality of the mind and unfairly label students' abilities.[4] Middle level teachers need to value and act on the belief that **all** students are capable, rather than trying to predict students' potential.

Ask yourself the following questions:

Do you think that the middle level students in your classroom are making connections across the curriculum and to life outside the classroom?

Could you and other teachers in your building increase student success through practices that incorporate the notion of multiple intelligences and favored learning styles?

Rep. Dave Hollister working with one of the Haslett students on a school wide service project focused on "Hunger".

The Value of Authentic Learning

How might your students best learn when given opportunities and conditions to experience authentic learning? Proponents of cooperative learning state that the majority of middle level classroom learning should occur in groups. Groups might consist of two students working together on a short classroom activity or a long term project. At other times, groups might consist of up to five students. The focus should be on working as a team by researching, questioning, reflecting and learning together. Groups should be heterogeneous so as to represent the diversity that exists in your classroom. This diversity might include characteristics such as gender, ability level, race, age, culture, socioeconomic level and student expertise. For example, if a project requires artistic talent, you should try to put a student with this talent in each group. Students who work in groups benefit in both academic achievement and improved social skills. Students who are having academic difficulty show the most gains but gifted students achieve as well or better in groups than if they had worked independently in the regular classroom (Lebow). Advanced learners have frequent opportunities to teach while working in groups. This allows them to acquire deeper levels of understanding and application through teaching.

Teaching the basics at the middle level today necessitates an increase in emphasis on oral and written language skills, quantitative and problem-solving skills, interpersonal attitudinal skills and personal management and teamwork skills. Your creating cooperative learning opportuni-

ties will support the development of these skills across content areas. **You** must model teamwork and collaboration if your students are to take you seriously about its importance. What messages are your students getting from you about teamwork and collaboration in your middle school? The U.S. Department of Labor states that **knowing how to learn** is the foundation for all education. Do your students know how to learn on their own? Or, would they more typically be described as "not knowing what to do when they don't know what to do?" If the answer to the prior question is "yes," what do you plan to do to enable your students begin to acquire the problem solving skills they need to become independent, lifelong learners? Will you also enlist other teachers in your middle school to commit themselves to helping students develop these skills in their classrooms.?

Comparing old radio components and the newest in electronics at a second table.

How we teach is critical to whether our students are successful learners and we are successful teachers. Unfortunately, we are teaching a curriculum that does not always emphasize what needs to be learned today or does not provide opportunities to learn the skills needed for success in our global society. For example, the language arts curriculum includes reading, writing, listening and speaking. In most jobs, which of these skills are used most often? Many might say listening and speaking. But which of these skills do we spend the least time teaching? Usually it is listening. Which of the sciences is the most concrete and connected to everyday life? The answer is applied physics. It makes sense to study applied physics first and give all our middle level students an opportunity to study this science before the more abstract sciences.

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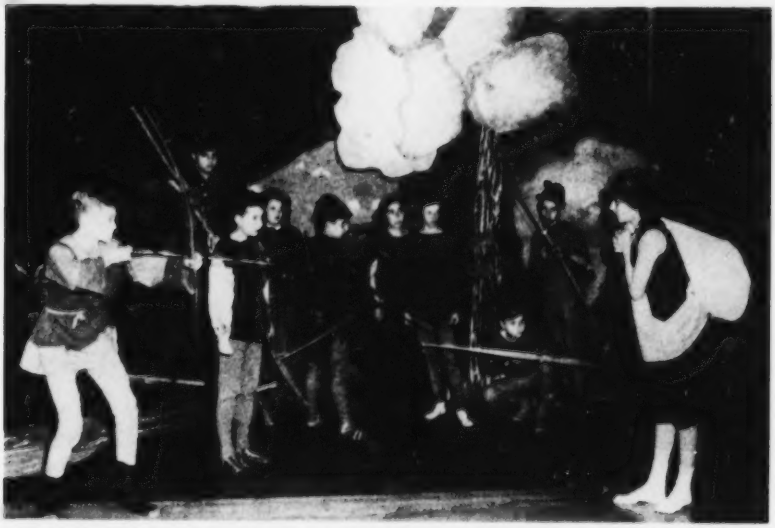
Today, we graduate more students than ever before. But are these students prepared to enter our world of work when they graduate? How many recent college graduates do you know who are not prepared for the kinds of jobs that are available? Increasingly, college graduates have difficulty getting employment or feel that they are under employed. Colleges and universities also need to restructure their curriculum. **All** our curriculum should reflect the knowledge and especially the skills our students will need to be successful. As William Daggett, Director of the International Center for Leadership in Education warned, "we need to be careful not to create the schools of our youth." As school districts adopt the state of Michigan's core curriculum, it is essential that a serious attempt be made to consider the question, "What do our students need to know and be able to do to be successful in the future?" This question will need to be revisited and the curriculum and performance outcomes updated frequently since our world is changing four or five times faster than schools in past years.[5]



Robin Hood, a play written by sixth graders. Small groups wrote various acts.

School districts need to do more than adopt a core curriculum. Educators need to work collaboratively to create and restructure schools to deliver the curriculum in ways that students will acquire a different education to better prepare them for the future. There needs to be a commitment to teaching for understanding rather than an obligation to cover content. Depth rather than breadth needs to be the norm. It may be necessary to add curriculum goals to what the State's core curriculum outlines as important for students to learn. A critical eye and adaptation at the local level will strengthen the core curriculum and provide ownership through involvement. Staff members need to be provided time to

work together and study the core curriculum and to help plan for how it will come alive in their classrooms. If time is not provided, the core curriculum will simply be adopted to barely fulfill the State mandate. If this is the case, who will suffer the most? The culture of the school, the way we do things around here, does not change easily. Even when middle level teachers and administrators are given the time and opportunities to learn and work together, implementation of new practices is still very challenging. The strength, support and success of implementation efforts are directly correlated with whether the institutionalization of changes in practices will ever occur.

One way to look at the core curriculum is to view it as a kit for a "prefab house." It comes with the basic materials and a few directions for how to assemble it. However, many people will need to be involved in seeing that this house becomes a home. The home needs to meet the unique needs of the family who will live in it. You begin to see the picture. So with the core curriculum, each school district needs to discover the potential the curriculum can have for the students in their schools and the important, challenging, exciting, and yet sometimes frustrating role they can and must play in making this curriculum come alive through authentic learning opportunities.

Creating an authentic, enabling curriculum requires that:

1. students need to feel free to risk expressing their ideas as they seek to create meaning;
2. students need to learn and practice constructive ways to confront issues and resolve conflict;
3. students need to understand that in a democratic society, the learning community highly values differences of opinion and the resolution of conflict;
4. our schools need to focus on the capability of students and their success on tasks rather than just on the ability of students;
5. we all need to recognize students for self-improvement rather than how they rank on nationally normed tests that compare and often disempower them and
6. all educators must be committed to teaching the curriculum to everybody's children.

Middle schoolers write an original play about the American colonial period. Language arts and social studies are integrated.

As we plan to teach our core curriculum, we must keep in mind the need to examine the structure of how we teach it in meaningful ways. We need to examine ways to integrate the curriculum by developing themes that connect learning across content areas. We need to provide frequent opportunities for students to work in groups and demonstrate knowledge and understanding through a variety of performance based measures. It is important for us to keep the vision of what we and our school want to accomplish in front of us as we take this journey that has no clear road map. Our sustained efforts can change culture and practice.

Our middle level schools need to be and look different in the future — not totally different, but different. There are questions we must ask together as we plan to teach the core curriculum. What are our goals for this curriculum? Where do we teach this? Where **should** we teach this? What strategies do we need to use to teach this? What materials and other resources do we now have to teach this? What materials and other resources do we need? How do we know if students have learned what we have taught? What do we do when students haven't learned?

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Assessment of Authentic Learning

Earlier, assessment was discussed as being an integral part of the learning process. In recent years, there has been a great amount of attention focused on assessment practices. It has caused us to question and inquire into the purpose of assessment, different kinds of assessment and the big question — which assessments are most authentic in measuring if students know, understand and can apply what they have learned. Today, we see assessment as an integral part of curriculum alignment. A curriculum is aligned when the written curriculum is taught and assessed. Assessment is needed to assist the teacher, as well as the students, in knowing what was learned or what was not learned and needs to be retaught. If the goal is to successfully teach and assess written curriculum "outcomes," then we must also take seriously the issue of mastery learning. If we're genuinely interested in answering the question, "How do we know students have learned?" then we must ask **why** we want to know and **what** we can do when we find out students haven't learned yet? Like our students, "we don't know what to do when we don't know what to do." Finally, we must ask ourselves, do we have the **will** to successfully teach all children?

Our assessment environment needs to highlight the importance of the complex process and understanding that emerge over time as students learn. By integrating assessment into the day-to-day classroom experience, we change its role dramatically. The role of assessment becomes dynamic. No longer a process to sort out students' weaknesses, assessment becomes an additional opportunity to monitor performance over time with an emphasis on effort and improvement. Many experts historically have relied on rubrics to judge performance and success. For example, consider performance based activities such as diving, gymnastics, debate, art and music to guide our ability to rate student performance. Do we question whether the criteria used to rate these activities are objective? We need to be clear about what skills we want our middle level students to perform and then arrive at a scale with descriptors that will define very specifically at what level of success students are performing. We can do this if adequate time is allocated for our collaboration in defining the criteria that describe success. Often, it comes down to attitude and will. Teachers are willing and ready to use more authentic assessments as tools to measure whether they are teaching for understanding when they are ready to base success on performance **efforts** that show continuous **improvement** over time. In addition to written tests, authentic assessment should include:

- student portfolios (student work collected over time — might include all of the below);
- student performances (i.e., speeches, plays, poems, dance, live and video taped);
- student journals (to reflect and express what is being learned continuously and to make connections);
- teacher journals (i.e., anecdotal notes on classroom observations);

- clinical interviews (oral assessment by the teacher or others to check for understanding along the way);
- student projects;
- student artifacts;
- peer conferences (to question, edit and think together) and
- oral examinations (to assess understanding of concepts).

Do we have the attitude and will to make the changes necessary to provide opportunities for more authentic assessment in our middle level classrooms? Our classrooms need to become studios, laboratories and workshops that give our students the opportunity to immerse themselves in genuine work, thus setting the stage for authentic assessment. Our school practices should emphasize tasks that stress that the goal of learning is to gain understanding, perception and skill while accomplishing a challenging problem solving activity.

We know that opportunities to learn from school to school and district to district are diverse. We know that students' opportunities to learn may be even more diverse outside of school. So what is our responsibility as middle level educators if we are truly committed to teaching everybody's children? We must begin by answering the question, who are our learners?

Eighth graders build colonial cabins and furniture in teams in an integrated social studies and literature class (Central Montcalm Middle School).

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Who Are Our Learners?

Veteran middle level educators agree that students are more diverse today than those who sat in their classrooms twenty years ago. Students now coming to our schools are needier and harder to teach. For meaningful learning to take place, we need to know more than the names and faces of our students. We need to know the demographics of our students and their families. Many more students today come from single parent families, more homes where people live near or below the poverty level, many homes where unemployment is more common than employment and from families where it is not uncommon to have drugs, alcohol and crime as a part of the home environment.

The statistics are frightening. Eighty-two percent of our prisoners are high school dropouts. Today, 15.3 million children in our country live with one parent, 90% of the time with the mother. There are 1.9 children who live with neither parent, but are in foster care or other arrangements. Twenty-three percent of all children today were born outside of marriage.

Of the children living with one parent:

- 50 percent of White children are with a mother who is divorced;
- 54 percent of African American children are with a never-married mother and
- 33 percent of Hispanic children's mothers have not married.[6]

This is a major reason we have an increase in youth poverty in our nation. Of all children aged 0-5 years, 23 percent live in poverty in our country. Today, 40 percent of the poor are children, while, in comparison, ten percent are elderly. While poverty rates are declining slightly, youth poverty is increasing. Household income is a major factor.

- The average income for married couples with children is $36,000.
- The average income for female households with children is is $11,299.[7]

This information, coupled with what we know about the socio-economic level of the student as being the best single indicator of school achievement, supports what we see as the results of the poor on performance in the classroom and on formal achievement tests. Our call to this challenge must include our commitment to enlist and collaborate with parents and others in our community to assist in providing equitable and quality learning opportunities. These opportunities must be available, both within the school and outside of the school for **all** students, but especially for poor students, and must begin at an early age. We must look at the roles we play as students, educators, parents and as community members in the education of all our youth, beginning as early as pre-natal care. Remember, "it takes a whole village to raise one child."

What Are the Roles of All of the Partners to Insure Education for All?

Before discussing specific roles, we need to again address the need and importance of partnerships within the school community and partnerships between the school, home and greater community. We need to look within the education community to realize the opportunities that exist for partnerships that can benefit students. Partnerships within school districts and partnerships between districts and colleges and universities offer a variety of resources to assist K-12 schools with their mission of successfully educating all children. Resources from non-profit and private sectors, the health-care professions and other institutions can add intangible and invaluable dimensions to the educational process. Finding community resources and connecting them to long-lasting partnerships with schools are often difficult and challenging tasks. Yet, the results and benefits are well worth the efforts.

Who needs to take the initiative in establishing these partnerships? School personnel need to organize the initial steps in the development of partnerships in the community. Eventually, all involved need to take the responsibility to sustain these efforts, but the initial leadership rests with educators in our schools.

With all this discussion on authentic learning and assessment, the importance of parent involvement, statistics about at risk students, and the need to collaborate and work as partners, what are the new paradigms and roles that we need to establish? How will the enactment of these roles help us to design and create schools and communities that will make a positive difference in the quality of learning and the equality of opportunity?

A paradigm shift needs to occur in the roles and responsibilities of the following school and community partners if our students are to experience success.

- **STUDENTS** need to be active participants in their education. Learning needs to be linked to their prior knowledge and connected to experiences in their daily lives. They need to develop skills to assess and monitor their own learning and value the opportunities to learn and develop knowledge and skills over a life time. Students need to develop skills to communicate and work with others as members of a team. Just knowing how to be successful by working independently will fall short for most workers in the 21st century. As important as all the rest will be to learn to accept change as the norm in their lives.

- **TEACHERS** need to be reflective practitioners who see themselves as facilitators of learning. They need to be accomplished coaches in the process of self assessment and encourage students to solve problems on their own as well as members of cooperative groups. Teachers need to work successfully in groups with fellow teachers, parents and others. Teachers will best learn to teach these roles by living them and modeling the way for their students. Teachers need to get involved with the work that needs to be done to accomplish the mission of the school. They must work earnestly to have parents, especially parents of the poor, feel genuinely welcome and comfortable in the school and gain their help and support. This requires finding new approaches for reaching out to these parents and no longer making excuses when we know what doesn't work in getting these parents involved. Teachers need to get involved with initiating partnerships within the community to assist them in their work. Teachers need to be problem solvers, risk takers and models of lifelong learners for their students and the community.
- **ADMINISTRATORS** need to be the key advocates of authentic learning and assessment practices in their schools. They need to expect "best" practice and the legitimate role of a teacher as one who facilitates learning for all. Anything short of this is not acceptable. Administrators need to support teachers in their roles and keep parents and the community informed about what the school is trying to accomplish, the roles they must play and the support they must give as parents to make a difference for all students at the school.
- **BOARD MEMBERS** need to create policies that are designed to support learning opportunities that are driven by quality but assure equity for all in the school district. They need to engage with representatives from the school and community in developing a strategic plan which focuses the schools on teaching for learning for all. The board needs

Student helping this senior load groceries in her basket.

to actively monitor if the administrators and teachers are working towards district goals and living by the policy.

- **PARENTS** need to be involved with their children's learning. School personnel need to make known to parents that their involvement and communication with teachers directly effects their children's achievement in school. Parents need to be given specific ways they can help their children, and educators need to learn from the knowledge parents have about their children.
- **MEMBERS OF THE COMMUNITY** need to develop the attitude that it will take the support and help of everyone if we are to be successful in educating all of the children. However, having the attitude is not enough. Commitment must be followed with action. This action needs to occur in cooperation with the school and parents. Together this trust can make an incredible difference for our youth.

Middle School Education Can Make a Difference

It is imperative that we all work together within our communities to improve the quality of life and learning as well as assuring access to opportunities for all the children in our schools. Each level of development as a learner deserves our critical and individual attention because of what we know about the physical, mental and social-emotional development of students.

In order to have an effective middle school experience, a program must be designed to respond to these needs of early adolescents. The curriculum must be balanced and integrated. Teachers need to facilitate not only academic growth but also assist students in the development of affective skills. Learning at the middle level needs to build on the successes of elementary school while preparing students for the challenges of high school. However, the middle school must remain unique and strive to focus on the needs of students at this level.

Middle level learning must include opportunities to:

- make connections to prior learning;
- provide a variety of activities to learn;
- integrate the curriculum by using thematic teaching;
- look at all learners as being capable;
- actively involve students;
- plan often for work on projects;
- have students work in heterogeneous teams;
- have flexible time to teach (i.e., block or modules)
- have parents involved
- increase student self esteem;
- have success in learning based on performance, on outcomes over time and on effort;

- have students assess their own learning and the learning of others and
- have students learn more about their own physical and mental health.

Obviously, what is being recommended as opportunities for middle level students is important for students at all levels. However, we must be aware that just providing the opportunity alone is not aligned to quality and equity in learning. **We** have to accept the responsibility for students successfully learning what is taught. The tolerance level of students at the middle level is very low when the basic needs inherent in their development are ignored. This is true both in life at home and at school. These are the years we literally have to "save the children." Many students remain in school until their sixteenth birthday but have mentally and attitudinally dropped out of school somewhere during the middle grades. For this reason, it is even more imperative that we provide professional development opportunities for teachers and parents of middle level students to assure that authentic learning experiences take into consideration what we know about the characteristics of middle level students.

Middle school educators have an even bigger stake in making sure that the learning and assessment practices in their schools match the needs of their students. However, the leadership of middle level teachers and administrators needs to be joined by educators in both elementary and high schools if we are to be committed to designing schools where students at each level look forward to coming to school and feel included when they arrive. Students must believe that they are capable and that what they do in school makes sense and is assisting in their growth and preparing them to be successful adults. Do your students want to be in their middle school? Do your students feel like they belong to the community? Would your students say what they do makes sense to them? Do all students in your school believe they are capable?

In Summary and Reflection

For too long we have tried to improve education from the inside, more or less in a vacuum. It is time we look outside the schoolhouse windows to find others to assist us in this pursuit along with scanning the environment to determine what "real" life skills our students need if they are to succeed outside the walls of the classroom. Succeeding in the classroom is important only if it is closely aligned to future life skills needed in the community as an involved citizen, productive worker and fulfilled individual.

It is hard to imagine all the specific cognitive, technical and affective skills our students will need when they arrive in the 21st century. However, as learners involved in action research, we must attempt to **anticipate** many of the skills that our students will need in their ever challenging and changing world.

Developing educational practices from the inside out, scanning the world outside the schoolhouse window, we see a world that requires

our students to develop skills to work successfully as members of a team. More projects of importance are accomplished by teamwork than by a single individual working alone. Today, technology is a part of every day life in the world of work, from the engineer at General Motors to the mechanic in the local car dealership. Life in the real world also requires aesthetic values such as an appreciation for diversity. Valuing the richness of diverse cultures, races, gender, ages and ethnic backgrounds, offers potentially dynamic perspectives for problem solving situations.

It is important that our middle level students understand the reality of change in their lives and that they are given the opportunity to understand the effects of change on themselves and others. This requires that **we too** understand and are comfortable with change. Our students need to see us dealing systematically with change, viewing it as a challenge rather than as a threat. They need to see the opportunities for growth and involvement for them that can occur from meaningful change. They need to see us as risk takers being willing to make mistakes to learn and improve. In the words of President Clinton in his inaugural address, "We must let change be our friend and not our enemy" and "we must work to shape change lest it engulf us."

It is also critical that our middle level students see us as models of lifelong learning. Through our actions they will come to value learning new ideas and skills as something to pursue and look forward to over a lifetime. We must realize the considerable power and influence that we have in shaping the perceptions and attitudes our students have about their future. We must remember that even within the mind of the reluctant student, there is a part of the self that wants desperately to learn. The strength of that desire to learn is ultimately determined by our belief that each of our students can learn.

Always, our actions speak louder than our words. We must accept the invitation to get involved in transforming our schools into environments that provide genuine opportunities for each student to feel invited to learn. We must create an atmosphere where learning is the focus and students' needs and learning styles drive teaching decisions and practices. Our schools must be places where all students are "coached" and encourage to take risks, work hard to improve, and to think, question, and make decisions. Our schools must be a place where students learn to solve problems while learning to work together. Our schools must be a place where we demonstrate that democracy in the pursuit of knowledge is valuable and where knowledge is only viewed as powerful when the minds of the students can understand and apply that knowledge in new situations. Our schools are where we believe that all our students are capable and where they, too, believe they are capable.

We can no longer tolerate schools that expect and accept failure based on students' lack of ability. Failure needs to be understood by teachers, parents and students as identifying the need for more effort and/or time to learn. Success needs to be expected for all students.

Assessment needs to guide teaching and learning for both teachers and students. The focus of assessment needs to be on improvement and effort over time.

Our accepting this challenge is crucial to whether our schools will deliver what we know middle level students will need to be successful in the future.

FOOTNOTES

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M.A.M.S.E. RESOURCES

THE MIDDLE SCHOOL — A HUMANIZING EFFORT $16.50
by Nicholas P. Georgiady, Addie Kinsinger, and Louis Romano

This filmstrip-cassette is an excellent presentation of the characteristics of a middle school. Can be used for teacher in-service or for parent groups interested in the middle school.

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FOCUS ON A MIDDLE SCHOOL BELIEF SYSTEM ..... $ 2.50
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by Glen K. Gerard, Robert R. Schwenter, and Fred Watters

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This manuscript is an attempt to pinpoint the techniques necessary to promote and maintain an excellent organization. Improving school climate begins with the principal, who must accept the challenge of developing a style that accentuates the positive and motivates staff members to do their very best. Practical suggestions are provided to improve school climate.

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MIDDLE SCHOOL – POSITION PAPER ..... $ 2.00
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and Louis G. Romano

This publication was designed to assist one of America's largest school districts to adopt the middle school concept. Later the original position paper was revised to meet our present day needs.

DO YOU HAVE A MIDDLE SCHOOL?..... 10/$ 2.00
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and Ken Wagner

A checklist designed to help teachers, administrators and parents to determine if a school district has a middle school. It focuses on "The People," "The Instruction," "The Activities," and "The Structure."

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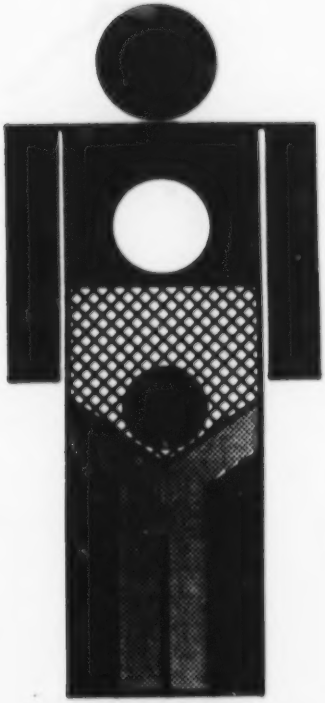

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